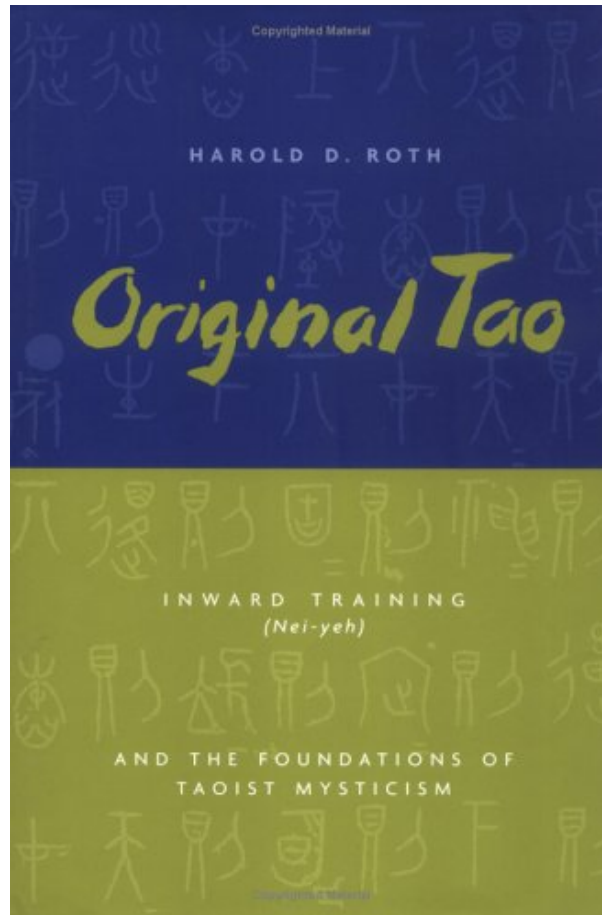
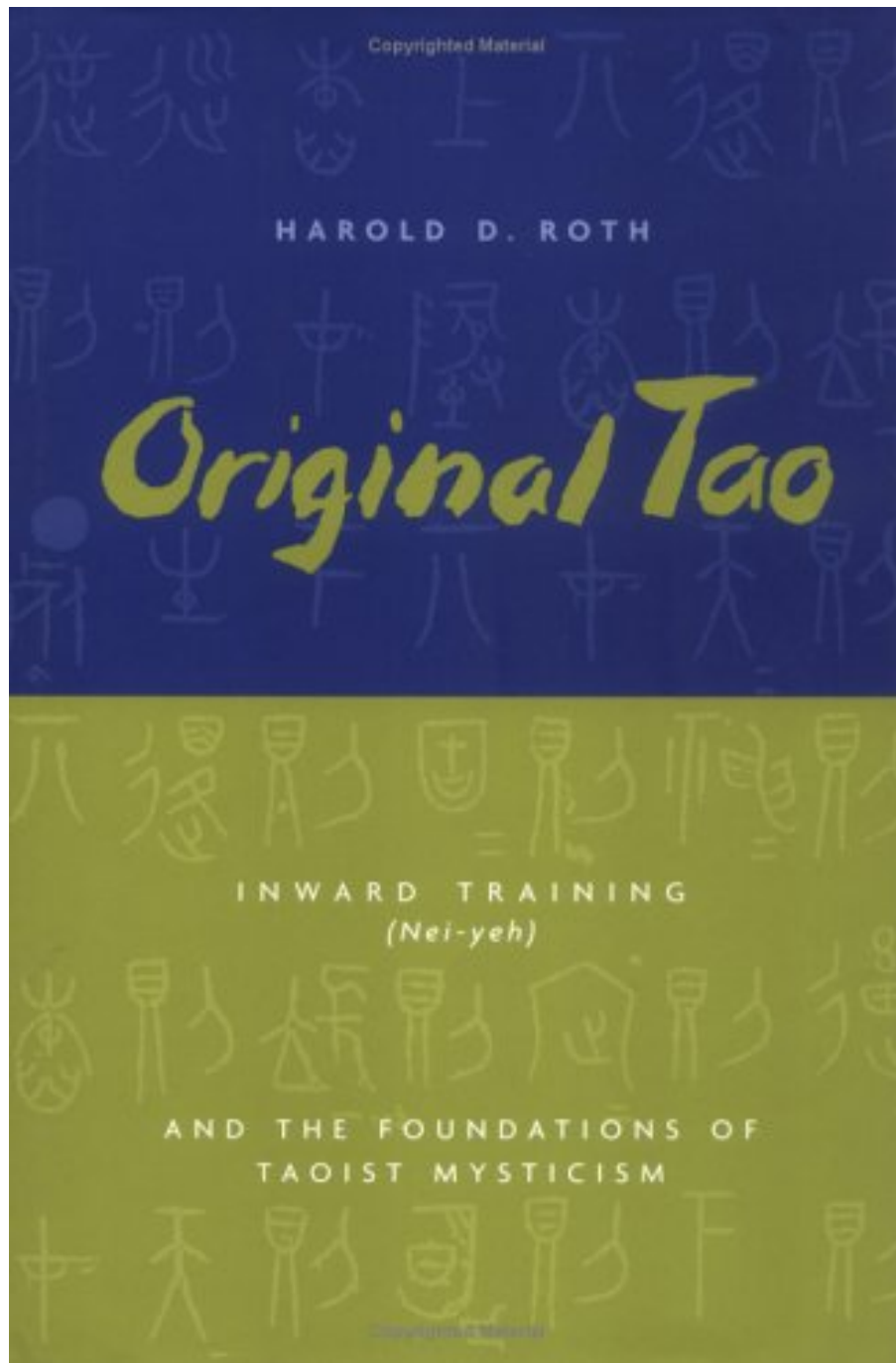


# ORIGINAL TAO BY HAROLD D. ROTH



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## Review

In his rigorous scholarship of textual archaeology and mystical hermeneutics, Harold Roth has given us invaluable insights, the analytical tools and a perspective to examine the religious traditions of not only China, but of the rest of the world as well.

(Franklin J. Woo China Review International)

Searching for the origins of things remains a perennial favorite of Western scholars. For millennia, this quest has been at the core of innumerable scholarly projects.... Harold Roth's Original Tao: Inward Training and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism continues this time-honored investigation, applying it to Taoist mystical writings, in a search for what Roth calls 'the original tao.'

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Here is a work that does justice to the beauty of this long poem, for so long neglected to the virtually exclusive benefit of Zhuangzi and Laozi.... The reader will find in the quality of the textual edition, in the numerous translation discoveries, and in the willingness to provide maximum coherence to this text, a profound and original effort.

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An estimable achievement by one of the foremost scholars of early Taoism in North America... powerful and original.

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Original Tao is an outstanding contribution to the study of early Taoist religion and thought. No one who is

interested in these subjects will be able to ignore it.

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*Inward Training* is composed of short poetic verses devoted to the practice of breath meditation, and to the insights about human nature and the form of the cosmos derived from this practice. In its poetic form and tone, the work closely resembles the *Tao-te Ching*; moreover, it clearly evokes Taoism's affinities to other mystical traditions, notably aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Roth argues that *Inward Training* is the foundational text of early Taoism and traces the book to the mid-fourth century B.C. (the late Warring States period in China). These verses contain the oldest surviving expressions of a method for mystical "inner cultivation", which Roth identifies as the basis for all early Taoist texts, including the *Chuang Tzu* and the world-renowned *Tao-te Ching*. With these historic discoveries, he reveals the possibility of a much deeper continuity between early "philosophical" Taoism and the later Taoist religion than scholars had previously suspected.

*Original Tao* contains an elegant and luminous complete translation of the original text. Roth's comprehensive analysis explains what *Inward Training* meant to the people who wrote it, how this work came to be "entombed" within the *Kuan Tzu*, and why the text was largely overlooked after the early Han period.

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Most helpful customer reviews

33 of 34 people found the following review helpful.

At the origins of Taoist mysticism

By Gavioli Maurizio

The centre of this 200-pages book is the critical edition of the Chinese text and the scholar translation of the Nei Ye (55 pages). Before and after this part, an introduction and 4 other chapters trace the history of the text, its contents and structure, its position in the context of the early Taoist mysticism and its position in the context of the early Taoism in general.

The Nei Ye is not a recent discovery; it was known since millennia but, buried in a supposed Confucian miscellany, its actual contents and significance have been since long overlooked. This book attempts, with success, to re-assess them, placing this work at the origins of Taoist mysticism, as the earliest extant text of the tradition which will later express more widely known works like Laozi and Zhuangzi.

"Original Tao" is a scholar book, it is not an 'easy' reading and the reader without any familiarity with ancient China's history and philosophy will be easily overwhelmed by the amount of names, data, quotations and so on.

On the other hand, its language is not too technical, and basic concepts are never taken for granted but appropriately introduced. And, above all, the new lights it casts on (and the grounds it provides for) the development of the early Taoist mysticism are for sure of great interest even to the layman who knows Taoism only through (more or less sound translations of) the Laozi and the Zhuangzi.

While not really new (it has now about 10 years), this book is definitely to recommend to anybody with a non-casual interest on Taoism.

The only (small) criticism I can make is the use of an old Chinese transliteration system instead of the now more widely used pinyin system.

27 of 29 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent introduction to early Taoist thought

By ACB

Original Tao is a wonderful translation of an often over-looked text. The verses contained within this short work rival and often surpass those found in the more well known Taoist classic, Lau-tzu.

In addition to the translation, Professor Roth's commentary on Chinese mysticism is phenomenal and provides an interesting back-drop to the history of Taoist thought.

I highly recommend this book to both newcomers and veterans of Taoism

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Another must for the student of the Tao

By bushidokop

Roth has done a tremendous service to humanity in this work. Through his diligent scholarship he has brought to life an obscure text that should have its place among the celebrated Taoist texts.

Roth begins with a deep digging into the history of this text. Though it doesn't have the heart of the text itself, it is definitely worth a read to find out the critical background of the text.

Next Roth offers his translation, which I found on point and beautiful. The final chapters offers his thematic review, which works also as sort of a commentary to the text.

I would highly recommend every practicing western Taoist to take a look. Though much of what is understood of the Tao has been written in the LaoTzu and Hua Hu Ching, this text gets to the heart of practice, and that is the development of inward training, and the supremacy of breathing meditation to align oneself with the "vital essence", as Roth put it.

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